

CLAIMS:

1. A method of irradiating a surface (L1) and (L2) comprising a photosensitive layer and immersed in an immersion fluid (L3), the method comprising:
 - applying a removable transparent layer (L4, L5) to the surface,
 - projecting electromagnetic radiation onto the surface through the immersion fluid and through the transparent layer, and
 - subsequently removing the transparent layer.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the projecting comprises projecting a pattern onto the photosensitive layer.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the photosensitive layer is a resist layer and the projecting comprises projecting a pattern to pattern the resist layer.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising a step of using the patterned resist layer as a mask in a further lithographic step.
5. The method according to claim 1, wherein the thickness of the removable transparent layer is such that imperfections in the immersion fluid are out of focus as projected on the surface.
6. The method of claim 2, wherein the step of the removal of the transparent layer precedes or is combined with a step of developing the photosensitive layer.
7. The method of claim 1, the transparent layer being removed by dissolving with a dissolving fluid.
8. The method according to claim 7, wherein the dissolving fluid is used for developing the photosensitive layer.

9. The method of claim 1 comprising a step of altering the solubility of the transparent layer after the immersion in the immersion fluid.
10. The method of claim 9, the altering being carried out by a post exposure bake
5 process.
11. The method of claim 9, the altering being carried out by a flood exposure at a different wavelength to the wavelength of the radiation.
- 10 12. The method of claim 1, the transparent layer comprising an upper and a lower layer, the upper layer having an alterable solubility.
13. The method of claim 12, the lower layer having a filter function to protect the resist layer from the altering step.
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14. A method of patterning a photosensitive layer covered by a transparent protective layer, the method comprising:
 - projecting a pattern through the transparent protective layer onto the photosensitive layer,
 - altering the solubility of the protective layer, and
 - removing the protective layer with a solvent.
- 20 15. The method of claim 14, wherein the photosensitive layer is a resist, further comprising the step of developing the resist.
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16. A method of removing a removable protective layer comprising the steps of immersing the layer without dissolving it, altering the solubility of the layer by a flood radiation step, then dissolving the layer.
- 30 17. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the electromagnetic radiation is focused on an interface between the removable transparent layer (L4, L5) and the immersion fluid (L3).

18. A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the electromagnetic radiation comprises dipole radiation.

19. A blank suitable for patterning, having a photosensitive layer, and a removable
5 transparent protective layer, the removable protective layer being formed of a material of alterable solubility.